

EGYPT AND SYRIA IN THE FATIMID, AYYUBID AND MAMLUK ERAS VIII: PROCEEDINGS OF THE 19TH, 20TH, 21ST AND 22ND INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM ORGANIZED AT GHENT UNIVERSITY IN MAY 2010, 2011, 2012 AND 2013

Prof. Dr. Giovanna Lelli (Ghent University)

We come from afar The Philosophical Basis of Ibn Khaldūn's poetics

My purpose is to analyse some relevant aspects of Ibn Khaldūn's poetics exposed in the sixth chapter of the *Muqaddima*¹ (Ibn Khaldūn 1332-1406). The sixth chapter of the *Muqaddima*, devoted to the classification of sciences, provides us with a precious picture of the medieval Arab-Islamic culture. Within that picture we can distinguish the multiple directions in which poetics developed in the great map of the Arab-Islamic system of knowledge. In this presentation I focus on Ibn Khaldūn's views on poetry that have a clear philosophical basis, relying upon the Hellenistic philosophical tradition of Islam (*falsafa*). I particularly refer to the impact of Avicenna (980-1037) and the Neo-Platonic trends of Islamic philosophy on Ibn Khaldūn's poetics, while I only refer in very general terms to the influence of rationalist Western *falsafa* (Averroes, 1126-1198). This latter topic would require development in an article of its own.

I believe that Ibn Khaldūn attributes to poetry a fundamentally cognitive value, which was provided both by the autochthonous Arab notion of poetry as the "Archive of the Arabs" (*dīwan al-'Arab*) and the Hellenistic philosophical notion of poetry as the eighth branch of logic. In the sixth chapter of the *Muqaddima* the traditional Arab-Islamic ethical function of poetry becomes subordinate to its epistemological function, although it remains relevant, given that the major concern of Ibn Khaldūn was to

¹ Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406), *Muqaddima*, ed. Khalīl Shaḥāda, *Muqaddima Ibn Khaldūn* (Beirut: Dār Al-Fikr, 2001). Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, transl. Franz Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah. An Introduction to History*, volumes I-III (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967). English translations of the *Muqaddima* are Rosenthal's, unless otherwise noted.

define the subject, the criteria and the limits for each single science, in order to establish its degree of certainty (*al-yaqīn*). My analysis of Ibn Khaldūn's poetics has the advantage of highlighting continuity between the religiously "orthodox" sixth chapter of the book and the previous "rationalist" and "empiricist" ones. Continuity in Ibn Khaldūn's thought does not exclude the existence of dialectic contradictions, which are not incoherent but reflect the dialectic contradictions of the Arab-Islamic cultural system itself. Every cultural system has its own contradictions, which are the potential instruments for overcoming the system itself when historical circumstances make that possible².

Finally I argue that Ibn Khaldun's Neo-Platonic philosophical approach to poetry, and more precisely to the nature of the process of poetical composition, can be fully understood only as the manifestation of what Fernand Braudel called les *grands courants sous-jacents de l'histoire*³. Ibn Khaldun's poetics relies upon a philosophical reinterpretation of an archaic notion of poetry that, in immemorial pre-Islamic times, was associated with the sphere of the magical and the supernatural, as the Koranic "condemnation" of poetry indicates. In Islamic times Neo-Platonic philosophers like al-Fārābī (872 ca. - 950) and Avicenna described poetry as a non-demonstrative, imaginative cognitive proceeding. Although they never explicitly compared poetry and prophecy, they described them in analogous terms⁴.

² Umberto Eco, *Le problème esthétique chez Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1993), pp. 5-12. Eco's analysis of Thomas Aquinas' aesthetics has been a source of inspiration for my analysis of Ibn Khaldūn's poetics.

³ Fernad Braudel, *Ecrits sur l'histoire* (Paris : Flammarion, 1985), p. 13.

⁴ Al-Fārābī (d. 950), *Al-Madīnat al-fāḍila*, ed. Massimo Campanini, *La Città virtuosa* (Milano : Rizzoli, 1996), see chapters XIV, XV, XXVI. Avicenna (d. 1037), *'Ilm al-naḥs*, trans. Ján Bakoš, *Psychologie d'Ibn Sīnā (Avicenne) d'après son oeuvre ash-Shifā'*, volumes I-II (Prague: Editions de l'Académie Tchèqueoslovaque des Sciences, 1956), II, pp.119-129; Avicenna, *'Ilm al-naḥs*, ed. Ján Bakoš, *Al-fann al-sādis min al-ṭabī'yyāt ('ilm al-naḥs) min Kitāb al-Shifā' ta'līf Ibn Sīnā*, ed. Ján Bakoš, volumes I-II (Prague: Editions de l'Académie Tchèqueoslovaque des Sciences, 1956), I, pp. 163-177. Avicenna's considerations on prophecy can be compared with his consideration on poetry: Avicenna, *Al-Ishārāt wa al-tanbīhāt*, ed. Suliman Dunya (Cairo: Dar al Marif, 1960), pp. 510-512. Avicenna, *Al-Ishārāt wa al-tanbīhāt*. *'Ilm al-Manṭiq*, trans. Shams Constantine Inati, *Ibn Sīnā. Remarks and Admonitions. Part One: Logic* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies, 1984), p. 148. Ismail M. Dahiyat, *Avicenna's Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle*, a critical study with an annotated translation of the text (Leiden: Brill, 1974).

The aim of Ibn Khaldūn in his *Kitāb al-'Ibar*, of which the *Muqaddima* is an introduction, is the study of history (*fann al-tārīkh*), of human society (*al-ijtimā' al-insānī*) and world civilisation (*'umrān al-'ālam*), of which he intends to discover the internal causes (*'ilal, asbāb*) and the general laws (*qawānīn*) ruling their development. In the sixth chapter of the *Muqaddima*, entitled "On the different categories of sciences"⁵, Ibn Khaldūn gives an encyclopaedic picture of the Arab-Islamic system of knowledge. Ibn Khaldūn also presents the position occupied by poetry and poetics-related disciplines within that system of knowledge, and he expresses his own views on them.

Poetry is an art that played a pervasive role in the Arab-Islamic culture of the Middle Ages. All pre-modern civilisations held poetry in high regard, and the "logocentric" Arab-Islamic civilisation did so even more. The ethic, cognitive and spiritual value attributed to poetry in the Islamic Middle-Ages is not comparable with the value attributed to poetry in contemporary societies. First, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries poetry was progressively marginalised by prose (the novel). More recently, in the so-called postmodern era, in Western societies poetry seems to adopt a minimalist program, renouncing its previous social and spiritual ambitions⁶. It is not an easy task to define the epistemological place occupied by poetry in the *Muqaddima*. When Ibn Khaldūn deals with poetics as a theory and a system of norms depending on linguistic sciences, he calls it either a discipline (*fann*) or a science (*'ilm*): *ilm al-adab*, *'ilm al-bayān*, *'ilm al-balāgha*, etc. When he deals with poetry as a concrete creative practice or as the corpus of the "Classics", he calls it a discipline (*fann*) three times, a craft or an art (*ṣinā'a*) four times, but in the large majority of cases he calls it simply poetry (*shī'r*). This fact reveals his hesitation to objectively define the limits of poetry itself too narrowly, those limits that the Arab

⁵ The full title is "The various kinds of sciences. The methods of instruction. The conditions that obtain in these connections", in Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, II: 409-463; vol. III.

في العلوم وأصنافها والتعليم وطرقه و سائر وجوهه , *Muqaddima*, ed. Shaḥāda, pp. 542-840.

⁶ William Marx, *L'Adieu à la littérature. Histoire d'une dévalorisation XVIII-XX siècle* (Paris : Les Editions de Minuit, 2005).

scholarly philological tradition had imposed to it since the first centuries of the hegira⁷.

It seems that Ibn Khaldūn worked on the sixth chapter of the *Muqaddima* prevalently in the last part of his life, during his stay in Mamlūk Cairo (1382-1406), where he worked as a Mālikī judge and a professor of Mālikī law, after having abandoned the political and diplomatic life he had lead in his younger age in North Africa.

At first sight, the reader is impressed by the gap between the first five chapters of the *Muqaddima* and the sixth one. In the first five chapters Ibn Khaldūn deals with the history of the Islamic world and especially the Maghreb, with the purpose of understanding the internal causes and the general rules of it through an empiric, scientific and rational method that remains unique both in the Arab world and in Europe until modern times. The sixth chapter, instead, is characterised apparently by Ibn Khaldūn's total adhesion to Islamic orthodoxy. He follows the line al-Ash'arī - al-Ghazālī, pushing further than the author of the *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* his formal refutation of the use of logic and philosophy (Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī 874-936; Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī 1058 ca.-1111). In the sixth chapter Ibn Khaldūn accepts Islamic orthodox literalism and semi-anthropomorphism in the Qur'ān's interpretation, the orthodox rejection of "secondary causes", and follows with conviction al-Ghazālī's inclination to Sufism.

The sixth chapter is structured according to the traditional Islamic classification of sciences. Ibn Khaldūn distinguishes between "philosophical rational sciences" (*al-'ulūm al-ḥikmiyya al-falsafiyya*)⁸ and "religious transmitted sciences" (*al-'ulūm al-naqliyya al-waḍ'iyya*), the first being of non-Arab (especially Greek) and of pre-Islamic origin, the second being of Arab and Muslim origin. On closer examination, as other scholars have pointed out, the real subject of the sixth chapter is not the classification of sciences for its own sake, but epistemology, both in the sense of a theory of knowledge and a philosophy of sciences⁹. I argue that poetry and poetics-related disciplines are analysed by Ibn Khaldūn from the point of view of their peculiar cognitive process and the kind of knowledge they produce.

⁷ Jamel Eddine Bencheikh, *Poétique arabe* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1989), pp. I-VII.

⁸ Ibn Khaldūn also refers to them as « rational sciences » (*al-'ulūm al-'aqliyya*).

⁹ Mohammed 'Abed al-Jabri, *Naḥnu wa-l-turāth* (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2006), pp. 323-399. See also Ahmad Zeid, *The Epistemology of Ibn Khaldūn* (London/New-York: Routledge 2003).

In Ibn Khaldūn's classification of sciences, poetry and poetics-related disciplines have a double religious and philosophical collocation, according to a well-established Islamic encyclopaedic framework. On the one side poetry and poetics-related disciplines (*ṣinā'at al-shi'r*, *'ilm al-adab*, *'ilm al-bayān*, *'ilm al-balāgha*, etc.) are mentioned among linguistic sciences (*ulūm al-lisān al-'arabī*), which are auxiliary and propaedeutic to traditional-religious sciences (Ibn Khaldūn employs the verb *hayya'a*, to prepare, and the adjective *ālīyya*, instrumental). On the other side, poetry (*shi'r*) is mentioned as a branch of logic, which is an instrument of philosophical sciences (*ālīyya*, Gr. *organon*). The philosophical collocation of poetry comes from the Hellenistic commentators of Aristotle. However this double collocation was not perceived as contradictory by the Arabs, given the common Greek and Arab ethical, encomiastic and cognitive value of poetry.

What may seem contradictory in Ibn Khaldūn is the fact that he gives poetry a place among linguistic sciences which are auxiliary to religious sciences; however he describes the process of poetical composition as a cognitive process reproducing Avicenna's theory of knowledge. But when he deals with religiously transmitted sciences he formally refutes Islamic philosophy (*falsafa*) in the name of Islamic orthodoxy: in a section of the sixth chapter entitled "*Fi ibtāl al-falsafa*" (On the refutation of philosophy) he explains that "the intellect should not be used to weigh such matters as the oneness of God, the other world, the truth of prophecy, the real character of the divine attributes or anything else that lies beyond the level of the intellect"¹⁰. In other words he refutes the pretention of *falsafa* to study and apprehend God by rational means, given that God can be apprehended only through revelation. How can we explain this contradiction?

First I should remind the reader that Ibn Khaldūn admits a limited use of reason also in the field of religiously transmitted sciences.

العلوم النقلية الوضعية و هي كلها مستندة إلى الخبر عن الواضع الشرعي. و لا مجال فيها للعقل إلا في إلحاق الفروع من مسائلها بالأصول ... بوجه قياس. إلا أن هذا القياس يتفرع عن الخبر بثبوت الحكم في الأصل و هو نقلي فرجع هذا القياس إلى النقل لتفرعه عنه. و أصل هذه العلوم النقلية كلها هي الشرعيات من الكتاب و السنة ... ثم يستتبع ذلك علوم اللسان العربي الذي هو لسان الملة و به نزل القرآن¹¹

¹⁰ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, II: 436-437.

¹¹ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, ed. Shaḥāda, pp. 549-550.

All of them [traditional sciences] depend upon information based on the authority of the given religious law. There is no place for the intellect in them, save that the intellect may be used in connection with them to relate problems of detail with basic principles (...) by some kind of analogical reasoning. However, such analogical reasoning is derived from the (traditional) information, while the character of the basic principle, which is traditional, remains valid (unchanged). Thus, analogical reasoning of this type reverts to being tradition (itself), because it is derived from it.

The basis of all the traditional sciences is the legal material of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah (...) This, further, requires as auxiliary sciences the sciences of the Arabic language. Arabic is the language of Islam, and the Qur'an was revealed in it¹².

Secondly, I think that the most important reason why Ibn Khaldūn describes the process of poetical composition in philosophical terms is due to the fact that he is conscious that poetry transcends the limits imposed to it by the Arab philologists and embraces a larger cognitive field.

Arab-Islamic philosophy (*falsafa*) had a deep impact on Ibn Khaldūn's thought. As a young man, Ibn Khaldūn received an education that included philosophical intellectual sciences. Despite the anti-rationalist orthodox reaction and the spread of Sufism in Ibn Khaldūn's times, he grew up in enlightened, cultivated, upper-class family and circles. He formally refuted philosophy, but his views on prophecy, physics, cosmology and gnoseology¹³ are largely based on *falsafa*, and particularly on Eastern *falsafa* and the philosophy of Avicenna¹⁴. Western rationalist *falsafa*

¹² Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, III: 436-437.

¹³ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, II: 411-424. Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, ed. Shaḥāda, pp. 784-794.

¹⁴ Jamal Abdelali Elamrani, "Prophétie selon Ibn Khaldūn et philosophie arabe classique", in *Ibn Khaldūn et la foundation des sciences sociales*, ed. Zeïneb ben Saïd and Georges Labica (Paris : Publisud, 2009), pp. 69-77.

On prophecy, see Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, I: 194-202.

(Averroes) had a more indirect impact on Ibn Khaldūn's thought. As Yves Lacoste pointed out, Islamic philosophical rationalism, freed from its metaphysical abstraction, certainly contributed to the formation of Ibn Khaldūn's empirical-scientific approach to historiography¹⁵. In the field of poetics the methodological influence of Averroes on Ibn Khaldūn is even more subtle. From an epistemological point of view Ibn Khaldūn faces the problem of giving a rigorous definition of poetics as a science and of poetical composition as a psychological proceeding. In a section of the sixth chapter entitled "The craft of poetry and the way of learning it"¹⁶ he raises this problem in a rationalist "Averroistic" way, asking himself: "What makes a poetical work a work of art"?, with the same methodological rigor with which Averroes defines the respective objects and proceedings of philosophy and religious Law in his *Faṣl al-maqāl*¹⁷. But the answer given by Ibn Khaldūn to such an "Averroistic" question is rather Neo-Platonic and relies upon Avicenna's theory of knowledge. Indeed Avicenna provided him with the most valuable intellectual instruments to explain the non-demonstrative nature of poetry. I don't know whether the question of "poeticity" had ever been formulated in these terms before Ibn Khaldūn. It is with scientific rigor that Ibn Khaldūn describes the act of poetical "composition" (*ta'wīḥ*). In modern terms I would say the act of "poetical creation", but of course Ibn Khaldūn could not employ this term, since creation is a prerogative of God and innovation is reprehensible in Islam. He clearly understands that the procedure of poetical composition does not follow the path of philosophical demonstrative reasoning (*'aql*) nor does it simply rely "upon information based on the authority of the given religious law" (*naql*). The success of the creative poetic act does not depend on a correct use of logic, not (only) on the knowledge of the scientific norms (*qawānīn 'ilmiyya*) of Arab eloquence and rhetoric, nor on a pedantic and correct imitation of the most prominent Arab Poets. Ibn Khaldūn points out that this kind of knowledge is necessary but not sufficient. The

¹⁵ Yves Lacoste, *Ibn Khaldoun. Naissance de l'histoire, passé du tiers monde* (Paris: La Découverte & Syros, 1998).

¹⁶ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, III: 373-390.

¹⁷ Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), *Faṣl al-maqāl*, ed. Mohammed 'Abed al-Jabri, *Faṣl al-maqāl. Fī taqrīr mā bayna al-sharī'a wa al-ḥikma min al-ittiṣāl* (Beirut: Markaz dirāsāt al-waḥda al-'arabiyya, 1997). Averroes, *Kitāb faṣl al-maqāl*, trans. George F. Hourani, *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy* (London: Messr. Luzac and Co., 1976).

distinguishing character of a poetical work, he says, is its “conformity with the models of the Arabs” (*‘alā asālīb al-‘Arab*).

الشعر هو الكلام البليغ المبني على الاستعارة و الأوصاف، المفضل بأجزاء متفقة في الوزن و الروي مستقل كل جزء منها في غرضه و مقصده عما قبله و بعده الجاري على أساليب العرب المخصوصة به ... قولنا الجاري على الأساليب المخصوصة به فصل له عما لم يجر منه على أساليب العرب المعروفة فإنه حينئذ لا يكون شعرا إنما هو كلام منظوم¹⁸

“Poetry is eloquent speech built upon metaphoric usage and descriptions; divided into cola agreeing in meter and rhyme letter, each colon being independent in purpose and meaning from what comes before and after it; and using the methods of the Arabs peculiar to it... The phrase ‘using the methods . . . peculiar to it’ differentiates (poetry) from (speech) that does not use the well-known methods of poetry. Without them, it would not be poetry but merely poetical speech”.¹⁹

The “models of the Arabs” are the “*asālīb al-‘Arab*”. *Asālīb*, plural of *uslūb* literally means pattern. This term has been used in Arab literary criticism before Ibn Khaldūn by Ibn Qutayba (828-889) and Ḥāzīm al-Qarṭājannī (1211-1285)²⁰, but to my knowledge Ibn Khaldūn gives an unprecedented philosophical sense to it. He explains what the *asālīb* are and how they function. Ibn Khaldūn says that the *asālīb* are “the” elements that make a speech a poetical work. There are “models” not only for poetry but for all literary genres and linguistic disciplines: poetry, prose, grammar, syntax, stylistics, eloquence, prosody. The Qur’ān itself has its own peculiar and incomparable “models”. Only poetical “models” are explained in detail.

Ibn Khaldūn describes the “*asālīb al-‘Arab*” as a universal mental form (*ṣūra dhihniya*) which the mind abstracts (*yantazī’uhā al-dhihn*) from the most prominent word combinations (*a’yān al-tarākīb*)²¹. Then the mind transfers that form to the

¹⁸ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, ed. Shaḥāda, 2001, p. 789.

¹⁹ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, III: 381-382.

²⁰ See G.J.H. Van Gelder, *Beyond the Line. Classical Arabic Literary Critics on the Coherence and Unity of the Poem* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1982).

²¹ I think that according to the philosophical interpretation that I propose for Ibn Khaldūn’s *asālīb* theory, it is also possible to understand the term *a’yān* as Avicenna’s “essence”, according to the

imagination (*khayāl*), as if that form was a mould (*qālib*) or a loom (*minwāl*). Then they return to the mind. It is in the soul (*al-nafs*) that these forms become “firmly rooted” (*tarsakhu*). A “universal absolute mould” (*qālib kullī muṭlaq*) is abstracted from particular moulds and the poet draws from it what is necessary for his poetical composition (*ta’līf*). At the end of this circle, the universal absolute mould leaves the soul and descends to verbal experience as processed poetical verbal material, ready to be used in its turn for new cycles of poetical composition (*ta’alīf*). Ibn Khaldūn describes the act of poetical composition (*ta’līf*) as a cognitive act, using the conceptual and linguistic apparatus provided by Avicenna’s *Psychology* (*‘Ilm al-Nafs*), the 6th book of the *Kitāb al-Shifā’*. Ibn Khaldūn’s proceeding of poetical composition is analogous to Avicenna’s cognitive proceeding, save that in Ibn Khaldūn’s text verbal combinations (*tarākīb*) replace Avicenna’s sensual things (*al-maḥsūsāt*). In some cases the two authors employ an analogous vocabulary. Ibn Khaldūn says that the mind (*al-dhihn*) abstracts the poetical ‘models’, which are forms, from the particular word combinations. Avicenna, in his description on how the human soul uses senses, also says that the mind (*al-dhihn*) abstracts the forms of the universals from particular things.

[ابن خلدون] :

و تلك الصورة ينتزعها الذهن من أعيان التراكيب و أشخاصها و يصيرها في الخيال²²

[Ibn Khaldūn]: “This form [the poetical model] is abstracted by the mind from the most prominent individual word combinations and given a place in the imagination”²³

[ابن سينا] :

explanation given to it by Anne-Marie Goichon, *Lexique de la langue philosophique d’Ibn Sina* (Paris: Desclée de Brower, 1938): “C’est un des mots désignant l’*essence*, mais avec la nuance particulière de l’*essence existant concrètement*, dans un individu donné ... », p. 257.

²² Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, III: 376.

²³ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, ed. Shaḥāda, 2001, p. 786.

النفس الناطقة ... فتحصل لها من الجزئيات امور اربعة احدها انتزاع الذهن الكليات المفردة من الجزئيات على سبيل تجريد لمعانيها عن المادة ²⁴

[Avicenna] : “Car, des choses particulières, viennent à l'esprit pour l'âme quatre choses, dont l'une est l'abstraction, (effectuée) par l'esprit, des universels incomplexes (tires) des choses particulières en abstrayant leurs idées de la matière” ²⁵

Ibn Khaldūn's *asāṭīb* remind me of Avicenna's forms of the intelligibles, just like the ascendant hierarchy of 'moulds' ('particular moulds', 'universal mould' and the 'universal absolute mould') presents a certain analogy with the hierarchical pattern of Avicenna's gnoseology.

Imagination plays a fundamental role both in Ibn Khaldūn's *asāṭīb* theory and in Avicenna's theory of knowledge. In both cases the imaginative speech is associated with a non-demonstrative, intuitive act of knowledge. In Ibn Khaldūn's theory it is imagination (*khayāl*) that works the verbal material in order to obtain poetical models, which then become well-rooted in the soul. Although in Ibn Khaldūn's discourse the mind (*dhihn*)²⁶ plays a role at the beginning of the conception of poetical models, there is a crucial moment in which imagination seems to be in direct contact with the soul (*nafs*), without intermediary faculties.

According to Avicenna's psychology man cannot usually rely upon imagination alone in order to attain knowledge, because imagination is distracted by senses. But there are exceptional people whose soul establishes direct contact with imagination, because their imaginative faculty is very powerful. It can happen in sleep, and this is

²⁴ Avicenna, *Psychologie*, trans. Bakoš, 1956, I: 218.

²⁵ Avicenna, *Psychologie*, ed. Bakoš, 1956, II : 157.

²⁶ According to Anne-Marie Goichon *dhihn* means “*Esprit* en général, sens plus large que ‘*aql*, intelligence, et correspondant parfaitement à la mens des Latins ... ‘l'esprit est une faculté de l'âme préparant à acquérir la science’ [Ibn Sīnā, *Al-Najāt* (Le Caire : Le Salut, 1331/1913, p. 137)], ... Cependant si on creuse le sens de *dhihn*, il apparait comme intermédiaire entre l'intelligence proprement dite et l'imagination, sens voisin de celui de l'estimative, mais un peu plus intellectuel, qui correspond alors à la *cogitative* des Latins », Anne-Marie Goichon, *Lexique de la langue philosophique d'Ibn Sina*, 1938, pp. 132-134.

the case of truthful dreams, or in wakefulness, and this is the case of a peculiar kind of prophecy.

و كثيراً ما يتمثل لهم شبح و يتخيلون انما ما يدركونهم خطاب من ذلك الشبح بالفاظ مسموعة تحفظه و تتلى و هذه هي النبوة الخاصة بالقوة المتخيلة²⁷

"Souvent une image se représente à eux, et ils se figurent que ce qu'ils perçoivent n'est qu'une allocution de cette image due à des paroles entendues qui l'ont conservée et qui sont relatées. Et ceci est la prophétie particulière par la faculté imaginative"²⁸.

Avicenna describes the cognitive proceeding of this peculiar kind of prophecy, relying upon the imaginative faculty, in an analogous way in which he describes the cognitive proceeding of poetry.

الشعرية مؤلفة من المقدمات المخيلة، من حيث يعتبر تخيلها كانت صادقة أو كاذبة. وبالجملة من المقدمات من حيث لها هيئة و تأليف تستقبلها النفس بما فيها من المحاكاة، بل و من الصدق. فلا مانع من ذلك و يروجه الوزن.²⁹

"Poetical syllogisms are composed of imagined propositions, inasmuch as their imagined aspect is considered, be they true or false. In short, they are composed of premises, inasmuch as these premises have a certain disposition or composition, which the soul receives by virtue of their

²⁷ Avicenna, *Psychologie*, trans. Bakoš, 1956, I:168.

²⁸ Avicenna, *Psychologie*, trans. Bakoš, 1956, II: 122. The *Muqaddima's* «Sixth Prefatory Discussion. The various types of human beings who have supernatural perception either through natural disposition or through exercise, preceded by a discussion of inspiration and dream visions», Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, I: 184-245 is clearly inspired by Avicenna's « Quatrième chapitre, deuxième section: Des actes de la faculté formatrice et cogitatives parmi ces sens internes. Cette section renferme un discours sur le sommeil, la veille, le songe vrai et trompeur et une sorte de propriété de la prophétie », Avicenna, *Psychologie*, trans. Bakoš, 1956, II: 119-129.

²⁸ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, ed. Shaḥāda, 2001, p. 786.

²⁹ Avicenna, *Al-Ishārāt wa al-tanbīhāt*, ed. Suliman Dunya (1960), pp. 510-512. Variations in the Arabic text have been omitted.

resemblance or by virtue of their truth. [That is as long as] there is nothing to prevent this [reception]. And meter enhances this [reception]”.³⁰

Also in his commentary on Aristotle’s Poetics Avicenna refers to the fact that poetry is “imaginative speech” (*kalām mukhayyil*), that is to say “the speech to which the soul yields, accepting or rejecting matters without pondering, reasoning or choice. In brief, it responds psychologically rather than in a ratiocinative manner. It produces in man the feelings of pleasure (*ladhdha*) and astonishment (*ta’ajjub*)”³¹. Both in the case of prophecy and poetry an imaginative cognitive proceeding expresses itself through a figurative language. I argue that Avicenna’s theory of prophecy (as a part of his Psychology) and poetic syllogism are indispensable to understand Ibn Khaldūn’s theory of poetical composition. Of course other elements contribute to the shaping Ibn Khaldūn’s views on poetry. As I mentioned before, in the sixth chapter of the *Muqaddima* Ibn Khaldūn provides us with an overall picture of the medieval Arab-Islamic culture. In that picture we can distinguish the multiple directions in which poetics developed, one of them being the philosophical one, on which my analysis is focused. But I cannot omit to mention that Ibn Khaldūn’s neo-Platonic philosophical views on poetry are inseparable from his empirical Hellenistic views on poetry as a technique (*ṣinā‘at*) and as a linguistic habit (*malaka*), that is to say an internalised knowledge of the poetical language which results from a constant practice and eventually becomes a second nature for the speaker. For it is at once empirical-inductive and intuitive-deductive, the linguistic notion of *malaka*³² is the crucial axis of the tension between immanency and transcendence which characterises Ibn Khaldūn’s poetics.

In my conclusion I would like to further clarify the deeper meaning of the philosophical basis of Ibn Khaldūn poetics. Within the framework of my interpretation

³⁰ Avicenna, *Al-Ishārāt wa al-tanbīhāt*. ‘*Ilm al-Manṭiq*, trans. Shams Constantine Inati (1984), p. 148.

³¹ Ismail M. Dahiyat, *Avicenna’s Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle*, a critical study with an annotated translation of the text (Leiden: Brill, 1974), pp. 61-62.

³² Probably the Arab-Islamic reinterpretation of the Aristotelian *ēxis* (habit). See Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, transl. Vincent Monteil, *Ibn Khaldoun. Discours sur l’histoire universelle* (Paris: Thesaurus Sindbad : 1967-1968), p. XXXI.

of the sixth chapter of the *Muqaddima* as the exposition of Ibn Khaldūn's theory of knowledge, I have argued that Ibn Khaldūn attributes an essential cognitive value to poetry, which is the result of the combination of two elements.

The first element (not necessarily in order of importance) is the ancient Arab notion of *Diwān al-Arab* and its development by the subsequent Arab-Islamic philological tradition, which continued to hold poetry in high regard but deprived poets of their authority on it, to the advantage of scholars philologists. The Qur'ān's primitive "condemnation" of poetry was the reversed expression of the extraordinary status that poetry enjoyed in archaic times. Then historical Islam came, and it rehabilitated poetry but under the condition that it lost its supernatural status, a status that had to be monopolised by God alone. However, it is not by chance that in the Arab-Islamic philosophical tradition, poetry inherited from its archaic status certain distinguishing features such as the fact of relying upon imagination and not upon reason, or of making systematic use of figurative speech and not of demonstrative reasoning.

The second element is the Greek philosophical tradition, which, from Aristotle onward, deprived poetry of its ancient supernatural value and turned it into "normal" literature. Aristotle in his *Poetics* rehabilitated poetry from Plato's condemnation, saying that poetry is "more philosophical" than history, because history speaks about the "particular" while poetry speaks about the "universal" ³³. Subsequent developments went further in the direction of neutralising poetry from its archaic supernatural status: Hellenistic commentators of Aristotle considered poetics as the eighth and last branch of logic; late Antiquity and a great part of the European Middle Ages considered the art of poetry simply as a branch of grammar³⁴.

Both the Arabs and the Greeks intended to neutralise the archaic supernatural value of poetry, attributing to it a positive but limited and worldly cognitive value. However, in the *longue durée* of history there are things that are slow in disappearing. Ibn

³³ Aristotle (d. 322 B.D.), *Peri Poiētikēs*, trans. Diego Lanza, *Aristotele. Poetica* (Milano, Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1990), pp.146-147. On Aristotle's rehabilitation of poetry see Diego Lanza, *Aristotele. Poetica* (1990), pp. 74-83. On the Arab-Islamic rehabilitation of poetry, see Giovanna Lelli, "Pour une méthodologie du comparatisme", *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hung.* Vol 62, 2 (2009), pp. 231-240.

³⁴ Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), chapter VIII.

Khaldūn found it difficult to decide whether poetry is a discipline, a craft, an art or a science. He prefers to call it simply “poetry”. Ibn Khaldūn understood that it was difficult to close poetry within the boundaries of the sciences’ classifications. The profound reason for that is that in archaic times poetry was associated with the sphere of the magical and the supernatural. This is a historical reality, not a personal find of Ibn Khaldūn. The great merit of the *Muqaddima*, which remains a “Classic” not only for the Arabs, is that it provides the modern reader with an overall view of the Arab-Islamic medieval culture, including the multiple directions in which its poetics developed. Doing so, it also indicates to us the long and deep survival of that archaic value of poetry, although philosophically reinterpreted by the Islamic Middle Ages.